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January 10, 2012

Lisa Jackson, Administrator
United States Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Jackson;

We, the undersigned health professionals and scientists, are writing to ask you to take urgent action to protect the victims of hydraulic fracturing in Dimock, Pennsylvania. Following the contamination of their water wells, these families are living without a safe source of drinking water and face possible health consequences if they are forced to use their contaminated well water. Specifically, we request that you investigate the contamination and, in the meantime, provide clean, potable drinking water as an emergency response action for these citizens. We believe that the US Environmental Protection Agency should step in to protect local residents if a driller jeopardizes drinking water supplies and the state government does not act. Your testimony before Congress in May 2011 on this very issue assures us that you also believe that the provision of safe drinking water in such circumstances is the duty of the EPA.

As you are aware, twelve Dimock families living in the Carter Road area suffered contamination of their wells shortly after the initiation of natural gas development using hydraulic fracturing. The contaminated condition of these families' drinking water was confirmed by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in 2010, at which time the drilling company arranged for daily water deliveries. But these water deliveries ended on November 30, 2011 even though questions about the safety of the well water remain.

On December 1, 2011, hundreds of concerned citizens, environmental groups, and Mayor Matt Ryan of Binghamton, New York, took on the task of paying for and delivering water. Commendably, EPA Region 3 began further investigation into the affected well water in Dimock in mid-December, and then, in the first week of January, residents were informed that the EPA would continue to investigate the drinking water. On January 6th, EPA Region 3 officials told the affected Dimock families that EPA would provide safe drinking water. And then, in an unexplained reversal on January 7th, EPA backed away from that pledge, leaving the families in Dimock, once again, without the assurance of a safe and reliable supply of drinking water.

We understand that EPA is continuing its investigation into the nature and extent of the contamination in Dimock. However, as long as there are reasonable doubts to the safety of the drinking water and the potential of its consumption posing a significant health threat, the families should not be placed in harm's way. In the face of the complete abdication of responsibility by the polluter and the state of Pennsylvania, it is incumbent upon EPA to ensure that these families have access to safe, potable water.

We are 65 percent water by weight. Drinking water becomes our blood plasma, our cerebral spinal fluid, our sweat, and our tears. It is the steam of our exhaled breath on a cold winter's day. There is no other human right as fundamental as the right to clean water, which is the right to life itself.

We call on EPA to ensure that the families of Dimock do not endure another day without access to safe drinking water.

Sincerely,
Sandra Steingraber, Ph.D.
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Science Advisor, Breast Cancer Action
Former working group member, National Action Plan on Breast Cancer
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